

CABINET

8 AUGUST 2023

ANNUAL FOSTERING REPORT (2022 – 2023) ADDENDUM REPORT

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Adam Price, Portfolio Holder for Children’s Services
(including statutory responsibilities)

Report from: Dr Lee-Anne Farach, Director of People and Deputy Chief
Executive

Author: Ingrid Crisan, Head of Service, Provider Services

Summary

This addendum report provides draft minutes of the discussion at the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 3 August 2023, in relation to this report.

1. Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

1.1. The Committee considered the report at its meeting on 3 August 2023 and its comments are set out in the draft minute as follows.

1.2. Discussion:

The Director of People and Deputy Chief Executive introduced the annual report which set out how Medway met the needs of children in care in the year 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023 and detailed the work to be undertaken in the coming year.

1.3. Members then raised a number of comments and questions, which included:

1.4. **Social Media** - it was asked how effective the use of social media had been in recruitment of foster carers in comparison to other methods, the costs involved and with the increase in digital presence, what more was being done to maintain Medway’s Fostering reputation. Members were informed that recruitment of foster carers was a highly competitive market. The team worked diligently to maintain the brand and reputation that had been established by ensuring it met its statutory responsibilities of provision of safe and caring environments for children of Medway whilst continually focusing on improvement. The team, despite being a small team with limited resources to compete, actively strived to maintain advantage within a

competitive market by listening to the information provided by foster carers and young people, and prioritised recruitment for more in house Medway foster carers in the community. The use of social media had proved to be a valuable and effective means of promoting the service in addition to the other methods used to target a wide range of people. The cost of Pay-Per-Click (PPC) for a 12 month period was just under £20000.

- 1.5. **Recruitment** - in response to question on the reasons behind the loss of permanent staff and what information was gathered from exit interviews, the officer said workforce was a national issue affecting children's social care. There were various reasons that affected turnover of staff such as people wanting to work closer to home or personal family circumstances as well as other issues. It was important to note that posts were being continuously recruited to and recruitment and retention of staff remained a priority in all areas of children's social care. Exit interviews took place on a regular basis and the information gathered was a useful learning tool.
- 1.6. **Recruitment of foster carers** – It was asked what intelligence was gathered from the applicants that withdrew their applications, or those that later went on to work for Independent Fostering Agencies. The officer said that people withdrew for various personal reasons. If a potential carer withdrew their application, then they had made the right decision at the time, because it was vital that potential carers be confident and fully committed before deciding to foster children. There were instances where months later, applicants may then decide to sign up with an Independent Fostering Agency, this was also due to different reasons, and it was not incumbent for them to provide information as to the reasons for their decision.
- 1.7. It was further asked what incentives and discounts were provided for foster carers to access local services and activities. Officers said that recruitment and retention of foster carers was a priority and discussions were taking place with colleague in public health on how to utilise their services in recruitment drives. The offer for foster carers had been increased in the last year, included in that were discounts for access to adult education, with some access to discounted offers for activities and leisure. The department also worked with the Independent Fostering Agency forum in Medway and surrounding areas to compare marketing strategies and ensure that similar marketing strategies were maintained.
- 1.8. **Data** - it was commented that it would be beneficial for a broader range of data to be provided in future reports which provided details on in house and well as independent fostering agencies. The officer said that the report was written as required, to evidence the fostering departments statutory responsibilities and that Members request for supplementary data was noted.
- 1.9. **Deregistration of foster carers** - it was noted that there had been a small number of terminations of approval due to standards of care. The officer said that fostering was a highly regulated and rigorous arena. Any termination would have been due to a breach in the high standards of care that were

expected and a decision for this would not have been made unless there had been a need to act. A Member added that there was a process that had to be followed in instances where there were issues with standards of care, whereby the local authority would try to work with foster carers and navigate through the complexities of the presenting issues prior to a final decision of termination.

1.10. **Permanency** - The team was commended for the hard work and success in achieving permanency in special guardians, long term, as well as connected foster carers. Assurance was sought on the occurrence of permanency planning reviews due to the changing needs of foster carers and children. The officer provided reassurance that permanency planning reviews took place on a weekly basis with a tracker kept that was overseen by managers.

1.11. **Decision:**

The Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted the Annual Fostering Report (2022-2023).

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Appendices

None

Background papers

None